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Gedichte und ihres gegenseitigen Verhältnisses voraus: dass er sie wirklich besessen hat, wüsste ich mit zahlreichen weiteren Beispielen, aus dem Divan und anderswoher, zu belegen.

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DESTOUCHES AND MOLIERE

The essential difference between the spirit of Molièrian comedy and that which obsessed the theater of the eighteenth century finds a curious illustration in an experiment of Destouches in his old age. This experiment, which he tried at least four times, was no other than the inversion of the Molièrian formula, the adaptation of the ideas in four of his best known plays to bring them into accord with the taste of the mid-century.

That this inversion, or conversion, or perversion, was conscious, there can be little doubt. Destouches knew his Molière well, and revered him; and in his second comedy, *L'Ingrat* (1710), he paid him the sincere flattery of imitation, for *L'Ingrat* is little more than *Tartuffe* as to plot, a *Tartuffe* done into melodrama. *La Fausse Agnès* looks more or less to *L'Ecole des Femmes* for its origin, though it develops into a sort of *Folies amoureuses*. But even if we neglect these imitations of Molière, we can not avoid seeing in the four comedies under consideration a conscious following of the model. In the preface to two of them he mentions Molière, in a third he takes over bodily the names of the two principal characters from Molière, and in the fourth the debt is sufficiently patent to stand without need of specific names.

These four comedies are: *Le Jeune Homme à l'Epreuve* (1751), *Le Dissipateur* (1753), *L'Homme singulier* (1764), and *L'Aimable Vieillard*, an undated fragment. Destouches died in 1754. *L'Homme singulier* was, therefore, posthumous, but was probably written near the end of his life. We know nothing of the date of *L'Aimable Vieillard*.

Le Jeune Homme à l'Epreuve carries no preface, but the names of Géronte and Léandre, father and son, are enough to put us on the track. It is, indeed, merely the situation of *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, developed in a diametrically opposite direction. Léandre is a spendthrift, it is true, but permeated with filial love and respect. Géronte is a father so loving and tender that he is with difficulty held to the point of being sufficiently stern for Léandre's own good. Pasquin, who takes the rôle of Scapin, has not a little of that rogue's resourcefulness, but he works in collusion with Géronte, and employs his very considerable gifts of dissimulation towards Léandre's reform. The entire cast, including uncle, mistress, and maid, labors to redeem Léandre by the gospel of love, and the result is all that might be anticipated of the author and the time.

In the preface to *Le Dissipateur* Destouches says frankly that he has set out to draw the reverse of the miser. He admits that Molière has said the last word on the character of the miser, that he had excelled his model, Plautus; but that after all it is an imitation, and he, Destouches, proposes to do something entirely original, and draw the opposite character, the spendthrift. It is not so essentially comic as that of the miser, and will, he thinks, be much more difficult to handle. It is much too difficult for Destouches, who could rarely see humor where humor was, much less create it where it was not. The resulting comedy has not a spark of the comic, and very little interest of any sort. It falls into the melodramatic mould which was becoming the standard, and has for heroine a coquette very *sensible*, and very, very good, while everybody else is irredeemably bad. And it preaches in solemn tones against the folly of prodigality.

In the preface to *L'Homme singulier*, again, he calls attention to the contrast between his hero and the Misanthrope. Let no one, he says, imagine that his *Homme singulier* is a new version of *Le misanthrope*—nothing could be more different. Different indeed; in fact, the exact reverse. Alceste scorns the man who loves the whole human race, and loving

the whole human race is precisely the peculiarity of Sanspair. Like Alceste, he deplores the vices of his time, he finds men for the most part odious, and all contact with them pernicious—but they are his brothers; and, remembering the essential goodness and primitive virtue of man in which the eighteenth century had such touching faith, he gushes with the milk of human kindness. That is his absurdity, his *tic*, his vulnerable side left open to the attacks of the comic spirit. Unfortunately, Destouches does not at heart regard such an attitude as comic, for it is precisely his own; and he could not, like Molière, jest where he loved. In fact, Destouches jested with difficulty at best, and nothing could be less comic than this play built about that most unimposing product of the century, the *homme sensible*.

In the fourth instance, *L'Aimable Vieillard*, he does indeed succeed in being funny, but where he least intends it. Perhaps this fragment should wring tears from the right-minded, but the right-minded are in the minority, and the comic muse has a way of intruding where she has not been asked. This *Aimable Vieillard* is a very advanced school for wives, but what a change has come over the spirit of teacher and pupil since the days of Arnolphe and Agnès! Their respective ages are as sixty-five to twenty, a rather greater difference than in the case of that earlier couple. But what an edifying attitude on the part of both! M. de Boisdoucet-Arnolphe insists that his young wife spend more money, dress better, go about more, and especially frequent the company of young men; Mme. de Boisdoucet-Agnès, on the other hand, prefers plain clothes, abjures the theater, abhors gambling, foreswears the company of her contemporaries, asks nothing but to be allowed to contemplate the virtues of her husband, and to celebrate his charms to her envious friends. Just what was to be made from this situation does not appear, for only the first act was written; but judging from the very many other plays of Destouches we may venture to assert that the result would not have been indistinguishable from Molière.

In these four plays the same change from seventeenth century ideas and ideals can be

noted. It is a change to which Destouches himself had contributed not a little. Destouches is in his own person the *homme sensible* of the century. His equipment for the task of writing comedies is of the slenderest; he had no sense of humor, no wit, no grasp of dramatic situation, no talent for writing dialogue; in a word, he lacks the sense of the theater. On the other hand he has a certain fertility of invention in the way of plots, and an unfailing instinct for the pathetic in any given situation. He is didactic above all things, and his motto is *castigat plorando mores*. What wonder then, that where Molière saw the absurdity of an old or even a middle-aged man's marrying a young girl, Destouches saw the possibility of touching devotion on both sides? Or that where Molière represented a spendthrift son and a rogue of a valet conspiring to cheat a wary and parsimonious father, Destouches gave us the sympathetic father and virtuous valet reclaiming the madcap son through love? Or that finally where Molière laughs sometimes at and sometimes with his misanthrope, sees the comic side of his situation while sharing with him his mockery of men and things, Destouches with his singular man gathers humanity into an all-forgiving embrace, and weeps over it—and preaches to it? The hearty laugh of the great century died away with Dancourt and Regnard, and we must wait for Beaumarchais and his barber to bring it back to the theater: it is not for Destouches to disturb the mournful atmosphere with indecorous mirth.

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NOTES ON BYRON

I. DON JUAN

A number of passages in *Don Juan* require annotation even after the admirable editing of Mr. E. H. Coleridge. The following notes are a collection of marginalia jotted down at intervals. The references are to canto, stanza,